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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

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29 APR 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: (See Distribution)

FROM: [redacted] 25X1
Acting Director of Global Issues

SUBJECT: Ethnic Movements and Political Instability

In the course of research into a wide range of ethnic movements worldwide, our Scholar-in-Residence [redacted] has developed a set of policy prescriptions which have been effective in dealing with ethnic dissent. To the extent that ethnic movements are a concern in your area of interest, you may find the attached study useful. [redacted] 25X1

Attachments:

1. Ethnic Movements and Political Instability, GI M 83 10117, 29 April 1983 [redacted] 25X1

2. Distribution List

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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 April 1983

ETHNIC MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Summary

Ethnic discord and the desire for greater autonomy by minority ethnic groups will continue to be a major threat to the political stability of most Third World countries as well as a number of Western and Communist countries. Some governments have been more successful than others in tranquilizing and abating this threat to national stability. We believe that these more successful policies have broader applicability. 25X1

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This memorandum was prepared by *Scholar-in-Residence in the Political Instability Branch, Instability and Insurgency Center, Office of Global Issues. Comments may be directed to* *Chief, Political Instability Branch*

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Effective and Ineffective Governmental Policies

Ethnic movements result from the reluctance of one ethnic group to ascribe legitimacy to a political system perceived as dominated by another. Their primary goal is not social or economic reform but greater autonomy and, in many instances, independence. As a consequence, ethnic movements have contributed to political instability in all types of states: developed and underdeveloped, democratic and authoritarian, Communist and non-Communist.

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A global survey of ethnic movements indicates that, since 1965, more than half of the world's states have suffered ethnically inspired discord. In a world consisting of some 3,000 ethnic groups and only about 160 states, the revolutionary potential is enormous. The level of political instability arising from this ethnic heterogeneity will be heavily influenced by the policies governments adopt toward their ethnic groups.

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Barring such extreme policies as genocide and mass-expulson--each of which has had its recent practitioners (in Rwanda and Uganda, for example)--no government has found a fully effective technique for solving ethnic problems. Some governments, however, have been clearly more effective than others in accommodating aspirations and avoiding violent separatist activities.

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We have compared the policies of those states most successful at peacefully accommodating ethnic aspirations with those that appear to have inadvertently encouraged ethnic unrest or separatist sentiment. While each country's situation is somewhat unique and the same policy may therefore produce different results in different milieus, our survey suggests that the following prescriptions are the most effective in ameliorating ethnic discontent:

- Grant local autonomy in matters which are most apt to arouse ethnic sensibilities, particularly in the areas of education, language, and religion. A policy of cultural pluralism, if directed from the center, may not provide sufficient immunity against secessionist sentiment, as attested to by the histories of Belgium and Canada. The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China offer further illustrations. Cases where autonomy has ameliorated ethnic discontent include Finland (the Swedish community), Panama (the Cuna Indians), and Switzerland.

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- Staff local law enforcement agencies (particularly at the "street level") with members of the group indigenous to the locale. Otherwise, perceptions of police brutality

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and discrimination are apt to fuel ethnic hostility, as has been the case in Croatia, Malaysia, and Northern Ireland.

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- In general, have local representatives of the central authorities maintain as low a profile as possible. States and empires, such as China, Ethiopia, Persia, and Thailand, prevailed for centuries without serious ethnic discord because the center's control was largely in name only. Such systems were in reality a series of quite independent, ethnically homogeneous political units. With improvements in transportation and communications, the presence of the center has become increasingly felt in Third World countries. As a result, China, Ethiopia, Iran, and Thailand are all currently troubled by secessionist movements. Special care must be taken to distinguish between the desired provision of services and undesired central direction, if stability is to be maintained. State-building in the political sense must be done exceedingly slowly under the circumstances.

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- Avoid in-migration of outsiders into traditional ethnic homelands. A homeland is more than territory in the perceptions of the indigenous group; it takes on a highly emotional content evident in such universally used terms as the homeland, the motherland, the fatherland, the ancestral land, etc. Indigenous people believe they have a unique and exclusive proprietary right to their homeland, and a significant intrusion by non-indigenes typically gives rise to hostility. There have been numerous recent cases of this phenomenon within Western Europe, China, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. Third World examples include the resistance to intruders shown by the Assamese of India, the Moros of the Philippines, and many Indian peoples of Latin America. The resettlement of enormous numbers of outsiders within a homeland can, of course, reduce or even eliminate the threat of secession. (Mongols, for example, now account for only some thirteen percent of the population of China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.)

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- Avoid creating any administrative unit that approximates an ethnic homeland or that is larger than the homeland but leaves a particular ethnic group clearly dominant (as in the case of the former Nigerian province of Biafra). In either case, there is a strong probability that the administrative unit will become an emotional focus for separatist sentiment. Current illustrations include several states of India (Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tamil Nadu), a number of the republics of the Soviet Union (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine), and the republics and provinces of Yugoslavia (particularly Croatia, Slovenia,

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and Albanian dominated Kosovo).

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- Draw administrative borders so as to subdivide any significant ethnic groups into several administrative units in each of which they are dominant. Drawing the borders of a state's administrative subdivisions in a manner designed to dilute the numerical power of an ethnic group should be avoided; the denial of majority status at the local level by such gerrymandering tends to anger affected ethnic groups and increase secessionist sentiment, as has occurred in the cases of the Tibetans and Uighurs of China and the Baluch of Iran. Division into a number of units in which the group is dominant, however, gives rise to several sets of administrative elites whose status would be threatened by any movement, secessionist or otherwise, involving the entire ethnic group. These administrative units should be endowed with sufficient powers to give the elites a vested interest in the survival of their particular unit. Switzerland offers one successful model. A further illustration is found in the division of the "Arab Nation" into many states, which has inhibited concerted action because of the competing interests and ambitions of the various ruling elites.

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- Co-opt ethnic leaders. Appointing leaders of important ethnic groups to positions of high visibility and prestige is a common ploy of governments, but, unless accompanied by real concessions to the group's ethnic aspirations, this tactic is unlikely to succeed and may be counterproductive. Total exclusion of a national minority from office will almost certainly increase secessionist sentiment, but a policy of co-optation will boomerang if members of the group interpret appointments as the tossing of scraps. Indira Gandhi's appointment of a Sikh dignitary to India's presidency, for instance, was followed by more militant actions in the name of an independent Kalistan. Co-optation may also lead to charges that ethnic leaders have "sold out" and therefore give rise to a more militant leadership.

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- Avoid allocating resources in a manner that is markedly inequitable to major ethnic groups. Flagrant economic inequality can inflame separatist passions. However, awarding special economic privileges to a minority is not likely to quell its political aspirations. Thus, Basques and Catalans within Spain, Croats and Slovenes within Yugoslavia, and Estonians and Letts within the USSR are all economically better off than the state's politically dominant group and yet manifest autonomist or separatist aspirations. Moreover, governments must realize that popular perceptions of a group's economic situation are more significant than its actual situation. Several studies confirm the propensity of ethnic groups to perceive discrimination where it does not exist. The

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Sikhs of India, for example, complain loudly of discrimination, although they are one of the most upwardly mobile groups within Indian society.

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- Any important concessions to autonomy should be granted simultaneously to all roughly equivalent ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are extremely sensitive to perceptions of unequal treatment, and concessions made to one group trigger expectations by others. For instance, when the Telegu-speaking people were given their own administrative unit within India in 1953, all other major ethnic groups demanded and received similar status over the next two decades. Within Panama, the Choco and Guaymi Indians are currently exerting pressure for an autonomous district (comarca) similar to that granted to the Cunas.

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